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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9418

INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

RUEHZO/AU COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 001903

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIOS AND AF/SPG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: USG HOLMES: GOVERNMENT WILL EXTEND HUMANITARIAN MORATORIUM

¶11. (SBU) On November 29, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Sir John Holmes briefed the donor community on his conversations with Sudanese government officials and previewed his upcoming trip to Darfur. He thanked the international community for its support, saying that the UN's humanitarian work plan for Darfur was roughly 80 percent funded. Next year's demands would be even greater, he cautioned, and UNHCR would need support for its camp coordination and protection activities.

ASSURANCES ON MORATORIUM

¶12. (SBU) Regarding his meetings with HAC Commissioner Abdulrahman Hasabo and acting Foreign Minister Ali Karti, Holmes said he had expressed appreciation over the progress of the joint communique, acknowledging that it had been "fairly effective." He cautioned Hasabo and Karti on worrying trends in terms of humanitarian access, noting the increase in aid workers being targeted by bandits and other armed elements. Holmes also said that he had received an "oral agreement" from the two that communique and the moratorium on humanitarian access would be renewed; they did not respond to his suggestion to "sign it now."

¶13. (SBU) Holmes cautioned that the repercussions of the Zok's Ark scandal could continue for some time. While he told Hasabo and Karti that the UN condemned the actions of the NGO, and that the incident was not typical of humanitarian activities, he said that the two remained skeptical. Hasabo was interested in examining a list of all NGOs operating in Darfur, he said, though what he intended to do with it was unclear.

DARFUR NUTRITION ASSESSMENT

¶14. (SBU) Holmes also said that they had discussed the most recent WFP Darfur nutrition assessment. The Sudanese government had refused to endorse the report, which shows increasing rates of malnutrition in the three Darfur states. (Note: In a previous meeting, the WFP head in Sudan said that the government was surprised by the report's findings; their own experts had underestimated the actual rates of malnutrition in Darfur. The UN is likely to issue the report on its own if the government does not ultimately endorse it. End note.)

STALLED UNAMID DEPLOYMENT

¶15. (SBU) On UNAMID deployment, Holmes said that there was a considerable lack of good will on the part of the Sudanese government. Outstanding issues included force composition, land and water agreements, flight landing rights and night flights. He said

that the government wanted to be able to cut off all communications capabilities when conducting its own operations, as well as to be informed of all UNAMID movements. Holmes admitted that if no countries contributed helicopters or gun ships to the force, "There is no plan B."

¶6. (SBU) Asked whether UNAMID would be charged with protecting humanitarian workers after UNMIS departed, Holmes said it would depend on the strength of UNAMID, but that the force would not function as "escorts." He said he hoped that UNHCR could eventually take on this role, but that OCHA would step in as needed. Responding to CDA, Holmes said that he had discussed with Hasabo and Karti the expansion of UNHCR operations into North and South Darfur, and that progress was being made.

¶7. (SBU) Holmes expressed concern over reports of forced relocations of IDPs in Darfur, stating that any returns must be voluntary and in accordance with humanitarian law. He urged the international community to begin preparing for this eventuality, and to be just as generous with recovery and development efforts as it had been with humanitarian aid. Asked by the Libyan ambassador whether the UN was more concerned with IDPs inside camps than the poor residing elsewhere, Holmes admitted difficulties and noted that some Arab tribes felt they'd been overlooked, but said that the UN was actively striving to reach all affected populations in Darfur.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: While verbal assurances that the joint communique and humanitarian moratorium will be renewed are welcome, the international community needs to continue to press for the government's actual signature. Continued delays will disrupt humanitarian activities, as organizations are now struggling to make plans for post-January 2008 operations. End comment.

FERNANDEZ